



## MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

*Maryland's Social Services Agency*



### PRESS RELEASE

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### **TEEN MAKES FOSTER CARE AND MENTAL HEALTH JOURNEY HER PLATFORM**

**BALTIMORE** – A few years ago, for 17-year old Katie Robinson of Randallstown, Baltimore County, being a beauty queen was the farthest thing from her mind. Just over a year ago, Robinson was discharged after a year-long stay at the Good Shepherd Center, a residential treatment center in Baltimore, not knowing where her life was going. Today, she is a spokesperson for the Center and has made her mental health journey her platform during the Miss Teen Maryland International Pageant competition.

Robinson's journey began nearly 11 years ago when she and her four siblings were placed in kinship care with relatives. She recalls that she was separated from her brothers and sisters, residing with her grandmother initially and later being adopted by her aunt and uncle. Some of her siblings went into foster care, one was adopted out of state and two were reunited with their mother.

In 2007, Robinson entered treatment for low self esteem, depression, and an eating and cutting disorder. She comments, "A lot of people didn't really know I was suffering. I was a cheerleader and popular among my peers, but I had issues in my life that had not been dealt with and they were causing me great pain and I was on the path to take my own life."

"I got better through intensive therapy. They helped me mend the parts of me that were severely damaged so I could live a normal life." After successfully completing her treatment and having completed her high school diploma one year early, Robinson won the Miss Teen Baltimore County International Pageant and went on to compete in the Miss Teen Maryland International Pageant. This provided her a platform to inform audiences about an issue near to her heart. She chose to highlight her mental health journey and foster care experience, calling herself a "living platform."

To date, Robinson has spoken to many teens about her journey, giving them hope for their own futures. She states, "The girls I speak to look up to me. I have been through some of the things they have been through. My message to them is to deal with the issues in their lives before they hurt themselves. I also tell them to be themselves even when peer pressure tells them differently."

Because of Robinson's participation in Miss Teen Maryland International, she has had the opportunity to be involved with many community service projects including the American Heart Association, the Johns Hopkins Children's Center, and Majestic Minds Day Care.

She is currently attending the Community College of Baltimore County part-time and living in a family foster home, which is providing her the support she needs as she continues her journey toward independence. She says, "I am so thankful for foster homes which are willing to take in teens like myself. I think there are misconceptions out there that teens have issues that can't be helped. My foster mother is very supportive of me. She wants me to reach my goals and is helping me to get there."

Foster families play an integral part in the healing of foster children who often carry with them invisible scares of abandonment, hurt and disappointment by providing love and support and a safe place to be. Maryland is seeking individuals who are willing to open their hearts and homes to children in need of love and support. The Department of Human Resources launched an aggressive recruitment campaign to secure 1000 new foster homes by 2010. For information about how to become a foster/adoptive parent, call 1-888-MDKIDS2.

As she looks to her future, Robinson wants to become a high school biology teacher. In the meantime, she will continue to champion her cause in hopes of reaching other needy teens. She reflects, "Even though I didn't win Miss Teen Maryland International, I have been able to touch so many lives with my message of hope. That means more to me than a crown on my head."

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The Maryland Department of Human Resources is the state's social service provider. The agency collaborates with 24 local jurisdictions to: provide foster care, adoption and protective services to children; collect and distribute child support payments; and provide temporary cash, food stamps and medical assistance to families. It also funds programs for homeless persons, refugees, migrant workers, victims of crime and women who are displaced, battered or assaulted. Last year, DHR served 638,000 people in need. In terms of its annual budget, DHR is Maryland's fourth largest state agency.